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AUTHOR Nebel, S. Sue
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ABSTRACT

When Loyola University dropped its foreign language requirement in 1971, another requirement took its place. Students are now required to take three courses in literature, one of which is to be a course in a literature not originally written in English. Introductory courses (called Masterpieces courses) in French, German, Spanish, and Russian literature were therefore introduced to help students fulfill their core curriculum requirement. The purpose of the German masterpieces course is to acquaint students with the major works of German literature from the "Nibelungenlied" to the twentieth century and to develop the students' appreciation for the achievements of German writers. In response to student demand, additional courses had to be offered. A single-author course was developed to explore in breadth and depth the work of one significant German author. Thomas Mann was chosen for this kind of study. A genre course was also developed; drama was chosen, with the purpose of studying the development of German drama through reading and discussion of representative works of major German dramatists. Testing for these courses consisted at first of essay questions on arbitrary topics, but take-home exams geared to the individual student's interests soon replaced the traditional method. Other improvements are under consideration, as is an expansion of the program. Two obvious problems have been the inferior quality of some translations of works of German literature and the change in orientation from a literature course in a foreign language to one in translation. (CFM)

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LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION: MEETING THE CHALLENGES

by

S. Sue Nebel
Loyola University of Chicago

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In looking back upon my experiences in developing and teaching courses in literature in translation, I have come to realize that there was a series of challenges with which I was confronted and to which I responded. My intention in this paper is to discuss my response to those challenges by briefly describing the courses in German literature in translation which I developed, evaluating some of the problems inherent in them and then indicating some possible avenues for future exploration in this area. While certain specifics of the Loyola situation may not be shared by many of you, I would hope that some elements of this presentation may interest or encourage, indeed challenge, you to develop such courses yourselves.

First, I would like to indicate the background for the literature in translation program at Loyola University of Chicago. Two and a half years ago the foreign language requirement was dropped by the University; this became effective in September 1971. This was not an isolated decision, but rather it came about as part of an overall evaluation and revision of the basic requirements for students in the College of Arts and Sciences. As a result of this evaluation, we now have a set of what are termed "Core Curriculum Requirements." In the area of literature, Loyola students must take three courses in literature, and one of those is to be a course in a literature not originally written in English. Prior to this

change, the English Department and the Classics Department had some offerings in European and Classical Literature, but our own Department of Modern Languages offered nothing of this kind. With the revision of the basic requirements, we were faced with a tremendous challenge: to provide new courses to help students fulfill their Core Curriculum requirement in foreign literature and, further, to make these courses interesting and stimulating so that they did not become, in the students' minds, "just another required course."

Our response to that was the introduction of a general survey-type course in French and in German literature in the fall of 1971-72; the same type course was given in Spanish and Russian literature the following semester. These Masterpieces courses, as we call them, have attracted large numbers of students and we repeat them at least once a year. I taught the German Masterpieces course that first year, repeated it last year and will be offering it again this spring. The purpose of this course is to acquaint students with the major works of German literature from the Nibelungenlied to the twentieth century and to develop the students' appreciation for the achievements of German writers. This is basically a discussion course with only one formal lecture at the beginning which gives a brief outline of the political and cultural history of Germany. Background on specific authors and literary movements is given as we move along. There is a mid-term and a final examination, both consisting of essay questions. In

addition, one short paper of about six pages is required. For this, students are to read one drama, novel or story which is not studied in the course itself. Since many of the required books are anthologies this is usually a simple matter, although many students choose to go beyond these. I define this paper for the students as an "individual discussion" paper, i.e. the student writes about some aspect of the work which is of particular interest to him or her. Often it is possible for a student to work on a topic which is related to his or her major field, such as history, philosophy or psychology. It is not a research paper, but is, hopefully, a stimulus to the student to pursue an author or theme that he or she particularly likes. Also, it exposes the student to one more piece of German literature beyond the required reading list. Many students enjoy this kind of project and even prefer it to formal tests, so I intend, when I offer the course in the spring, to allow them the option of replacing the mid-term exam with an additional "individual discussion" paper.

The reactions to this Masterpieces course have been somewhat surprising and most gratifying. A number of students became very interested in foreign literature and enrolled in the Masterpieces courses in the other language sections in the department. But there were also those who wished to continue in German literature, and for them, as well as for the Core Curriculum, other courses had to be developed. This was our second challenge: the demand for new and different courses in

German literature in translation. My response to this second challenge was to develop and teach in the second semester of 1971-72 a single-author course, the purpose of which was to explore in breadth and depth the work of one significant German author. My choice for this kind of study was Thomas Mann. We read and discussed three of his major novels and several short stories. When I gave the course the first time, I tried to discuss some of Mann's essays with the students in the last few weeks, but it was not successful. They had had their fill of philosophical ideas after struggling through The Magic Mountain and badly needed some relief at that point. I am teaching this course again in the current semester and have substituted The Confessions of Felix Krull as the final selection, reserving the essays as recommended supplementary reading for those students who are especially interested in that aspect of Mann's works.

I have experimented somewhat with the testing in this course. Two years ago I gave two essay-type exams with an option each time to do a paper instead. This year there are no exams, just two papers: the first one a short paper either on the early works of Mann which we discussed or on an additional work from that period; the second, a "project" on Mann's later writings or ideas. Christmas vacation and the last two weeks of the semester in early January have been designated as an "independent work period" for this. The final project may be in the form of paper, an oral pre-

sentation to the class or an informal discussion with me. There is a final examination, a take-home test, at the end of the course.

Another type of course which I developed in reponse to the demand for additional German literature courses is a genre-course, in this case the drama. This course, which has the title "German Drama from Lessing to Brecht," was first offered last spring. Our aim was to study the development of German drama through reading and discussion of representative works of the major German dramatists. The course was roughly divided into two parts: the "traditional" in which we studied plays of Lessing, Schiller, Goethe, Kleist and Hebbel, and the "modern" which covered selections by Büchner, Ibsen, Hauptmann, Wedekind, Kaiser and Brecht. In order to stimulate the students, I experimented with the structure of the course more than I had done before. Instead of meeting the class for the normal three days each week as scheduled, I met with the entire class only on two days. On the third day I met with them in small groups to discuss an additional play, one which was related to what was being covered in the other sessions that week. I will explain how this worked by giving an example. When we studied Schiller, we did one Sturm und Drang play, Love and Intrigue, and one historical play, Mary Stuart, in the larger sessions. The students then had the choice between an additional Sturm und Drang play, The Robbers, or a historical one, The Death

of Wallenstein, whichever type interested them more. Each of the plays was discussed by approximately half of the class in two sessions. In the remainder of the course students had this same option with other plays and authors. The experiement was, I think, a success, and not without some interesting results. The Monday sessions were sometimes larger than anticipated because students from the other group would come to sit in on the discussion, a privilege which I had indicated was always theirs. Also, students who tended to be reticent in the regular class sessions felt more at ease in a smaller group and became more talkative, an effect which they often took with them back to the larger sessions. The only formal test in this course was the final examination, a take-home exam, consisting of general essay topics or problems. During the semester each student wrote two "individual discussion" papers, one on a work read as part of the course and one on an additional play by a dramatist whom we had studied.

In all of these courses the final class meeting is devoted to evaluation. Every part of the course is open to review: the reading list, the approach, the structure and testing; and students have usually been very straightforward in their criticisms and suggestions for revisions. These student opinions have been most helpful to me in meeting the thrid, and probably the most important, challenge in this area of literature in translation: the need to imrpove and expand the program. This is an open-ended challenge; we can never stop evaluating, revising and trying new things in our teaching.

It is not enough just to meet the first two challenges, to develop two or three courses and then repeat them each year in the same form. Many of them are worth giving more than once, but I maintain that each time they must contain changes which represent improvement. For instance, when I repeat a course I eliminate certain works from the original reading list and substitute others, largely on the basis of student evaluations and also on my own increasing awareness of what works are available in translation.

I have also instituted a number of changes in the basic structure of these courses, as I have worked with them. A student in that first Mann course remarked in the evaluation session that he had enjoyed the course because it had been very "non-traditional" but he objected to my reliance on the very "traditional" methods of testing. It was a striking remark which immediately set me to considering changes. Also, my experience with essay-type tests in those first courses had generally been frustrating, if not boring, as I read twenty-five or more versions of the same answer, the majority of which were repetitions of my own remarks from the class discussions. One's own ideas may sound fine in the moment that they are expressed, but by the tenth time around in an exam they begin to sound pretty bad! I found in grading those tests that I usually awarded the highest grades to those students who showed some imagination and individual reflection in their answers. It occurred to me that if I was placing such high

value on imagination and personal involvement with the literature, then I ought to be making a conscious effort to stimulate and develop these qualities in the students. So, I began to re-structure the courses, requiring the informal papers geared to the individual student's interests in place of tests with arbitrary topics. With this opportunity the students began to produce papers on a wide range of themes, which makes for very interesting reading for the instructor! It has also helped the pace of class discussion, for without the threat of tests, students seem to feel less need to take copious notes and, as a result, enter more freely into the discussions. I no longer give a final exam in the prescribed examination period, but instead use take-home exams. With this type of test students have some time(usually three or four days) to consider the questions, to formulate their answers more clearly and to refer to the text or other sources. The results have been quite good. I was especially pleased with the exam from the drama course, where one of the "problems" for the students was the opportunity to change the ending of any play which they had read. They were to describe the new ending and then evaluate its effects on the theme and the characters of the original. It is a most interesting and sometimes amusing experience for a teacher of literature to read new versions of old favorites! I must say that in some instances the student presented a solid argument for the change, and also, that some people, after devising a new resolution

and reflecting on it, came to a deeper appreciation of the original one.

In considering these courses from the standpoint of developing and teaching them, one becomes aware of certain problems or difficulties. The first, very obvious one is the availability of works of German literature in English. There are a significant number which can be used, but the quality of translation is not always consistent and occasionally important parts of the original text have been edited out. Hopefully, if literature in translation develops into a strong program in a large number of schools, the demand for new and better translations will improve the situation. Meanwhile, we have to keep on examining catalogues to find books and try them in our courses.

Second, it is necessary for the teacher to make some very basic adjustments when moving into this area of teaching, especially if he or she is also involved in literature courses for language majors or other advanced students. It is a mistake to assume that the approach for one can simply be transferred to the other. Literature courses for advanced students of German are intensive; we consider works in many ways: plot, character, use of language, etc. A course in literature in translation, since it is for most students their only contact with German literature, is extensive,or at least I believe it is. I try in these courses to expose the students to as much literature as possible within the framework of the

specific course. The peculiar nature of a literature in translation course has another problem: the problem of the two languages. Students are often curious about the original language and a very common request is for the opportunity to hear German in some form. There is need for caution here. We must not give too much; yet we want to stimulate the interest of the more inquisitive students and perhaps lead them eventually to the study of the language itself. In reponse to this interest, I have tried to introduce some German into the classroom. In the Mann course, I played a recording of Thomas Mann himself reading the opening chapter of Tonio Kröger with the students following a copy of the original along with their translated versions. When the need arises for terms such as Sturm und Drang or Bildungsroman, I give both the German and English forms because I am reasonably certain that the students will encounter the German terms in some other context in the future.

The evaluation and revision of the existing courses in literature in translation is only half of the response to the challenge of improvement; the other half is expansion of the program. Certain variations on the basic three types of courses that I have described here are one possibility. In the survey-type course one could concentrate on a specific period rather than covering a wide range of German literature. One of my colleagues at Loyola is now teaching a course on just twentieth-century German literature. This same

focus on a shorter period of time could be used in the genre course, e.g. a course in modern drama. Thomas Mann is only one of several authors whose work could be studied in a single-author course. Modern writers whose works are available in English and who could be treated in this way are Brecht, Kafka and Hesse. Students in the survey courses seem to find modern authors most interesting, but there are a significant number who enjoy, and sometimes even prefer, the earlier ones such as Lessing, Goethe and Schiller. I think a course on one of these writers or perhaps on two of them, with half of the semester devoted to each would have some appeal.

Moving beyond these variations, there are any number of possibilities for new courses. For those students who become excited and involved in a particular author or literary period, I would like to see an independent-study course created. A number of my students in the Mann course are fascinated with him and would like to continue to study his writings on an individual, supervised basis. Another type of course is a theme-course, in which a specific them as it is found in different works of German literature could be considered. I have been working on developing this kind of course, an exploration of the relationship of the individual to society and the question of the individual struggling against power and mechanization. I will give this course for the first time next semester.

As we improve and expand the program in literature in translation, we might also consider moving beyond the specific field of German literature and work in cooperation with other fields of literature and other disciplines as well. The idea of inter-disciplinary courses is an exciting one, one which could develop all kinds of new courses and also provide valuable contact and communication with faculty members in our institutions. Some possibilities in this area are courses in philosophy and literature and psychology and literature. At Loyola we have also discussed the idea of a history of a genre course in cooperation with the Department of Classical Studies. Such a course would trace the development of a genre from its early forms in classical literature to its modern development in European literature.

These, then, are what I consider to be the challenges in the area of literature in translation, based on my own experience. Once the initial challenge to provide a program in literature in translation is accepted, then the other challenges to improve and expand the program naturally follow. I have used the term "challenge" quite deliberately because of its implications. A challenge, as I understand it, confronts us with a problem or a stituation to which we must respond in a positive, unique way. Certainly the challenge to provide such courses is a gold opportunity to creative response. Also, we generally say that a person "rises" to meet a challenge. I am convinced that, as we tap our own resources of knowledge

and imagination to develop these courses and as we discuss the themes and ideas with a wider range of students, we cannot help but "rise," i.e. improve and grow as teachers, and I would like to add, as students ourselves of German literature.